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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY KELLI DUNHAM

The trees are blooming, the pollen is swirling, and Michigan's queer events calendar is fully activated. Whether you're sneezing through your seasonal allergies or just emotionally allergic to heteronormativity, hopefully this lineup offers something to help you breathe easier. Here are five excellent reasons to leave your house — or, if not your house, at least your comfort zone.

Lambrini Girls. Photo: Instagram/@lambrinigirlz

1 Catch a Quirky Queer Act in Detroit

If your Spotify Wrapped had even one queer heartbreak anthem or chaotic joy bop, you'll want to hit Detroit in early May. Japanese Breakfast plays May 3, fronted by the multi-talented Michelle Zauner (yes, of "Crying in H Mart" fame), who's also openly bisexual/queer. Zauner will be warming up for her July Coachella appearance alongside iconic LGBTQ+ artists including Phoebe Bridgers, Girl in Red, Orville Peck, Kim Petras and DJ Honey Dijon.

On May 7, don't miss Lambrini Girls, a U.K. punk trio powered by lesbian vocalist Phoebe Lunny and bisexual bassist Lilly Macieira. Rolling Stone called them "a fizzing cocktail of righteous queer fury" and if there's one thing we all need in our collective lives right now, it's a million percent more righteous queer fury. The trio's banger "Help Me I'm Gay" is less a plea for help and more a warning. And an anthem. Catch them now, so you can brag later.

Check venue listings for tickets and info; Lambrini Girls at SanctuaryDetroit.com and Japanese Breakfast at TheFillmoreDetroit.com.

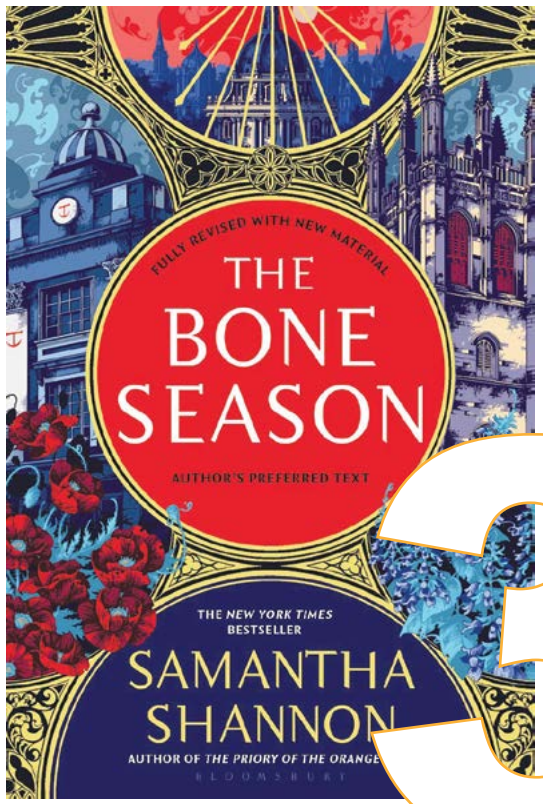
2 Don't Miss Miss Gay Michigan

Miss Gay Michigan 2024 Keirston LePaige. Photo: Facebook

Sequins? Check. Talent? Check. More drama than your group text? Absolutely. The 2025 Miss Gay Michigan America Pageant returns with a full evening of pageantry, poise and powerhouse performances. This is no casual crown — winners go on to compete in Miss Gay America and — as organizers remind us in all caps, Miss Gay Michigan has been in the top 10 in each of the two last years! You'll be able to say, "I saw her when."

Expect everything from stunning gowns to lip syncs that might rewire your entire nervous system. Bring friends. Bring singles for tipping non-competing performers. Bring your fiercest commentary. Bring a standing ovation.

May 10, 4–11 p.m., DoubleTree Dearborn (5801 Southfield Freeway, Detroit). Reserve tickets at bit.ly/MissGayMichigan.



3 Read Along with This Virtual Book Club

Love books and chatting with people who span generations and gender spectrums? MiGen's Intergenerational Book Club is your low-key Thursday night dream. The group meets virtually every month, reading LGBTQ+ books and actually talking about them (not just letting them sit next to your bed for three weeks while you scroll). There's no pressure to be brilliant — just bring your thoughts and your internet connection.

In May and June, the book club is reading "The Bone Season" by Samantha Shannon. Set in a dystopian future, the novel features a diverse range of characters and explores themes of power dynamics, identity and oppression.

Second Thursdays of the month, 6–7 p.m., virtual. Sign up at bit.ly/MiGenBookClub.

4

Chat About Death

No, really. The Queer Death Café might sound a little scary on the outside. But inside, it's all coziness personified with thoughtful queers, coffee and candid conversations about mortality, grief and how to make the most of the time we have. Whether you're death-curious, grieving or just trying to get your end-of-life ducks in a row, it's a space for honesty, connection and maybe even a little laughter.

Queer Death Café facilitator Grey Allen tells BTL, "Both queerness and death defy tidy categories; they exist in spaces of nuance, transformation and multiplicity. There's something profound in recognizing that dying, like living and loving, is a deeply personal and varied experience — shaped by culture, identity, circumstance and belief. Queer Death Café offers a space where LGBTQIA+ folks can have these conversations."

First Saturday of the month, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m, Jim Toy Community Center (560 S. Main St., Ann Arbor). RSVP at bit.ly/QueerDeathCafe.

5

Make Your Health Wishes Known

If you've been to the Queer Death Café, you've already dipped a toe into some tender conversational edgeplay. Ready to turn up the intensity? Let's talk healthcare decision-making.

It's probably fair to say that thinking about what might happen if we couldn't make medical decisions for ourselves isn't anyone's idea of a dreamy Friday night activity. But if you're not legally connected to any of your chosen family, your biological family will likely be the default decision-makers. Your Uncle Ted weighing in about your testosterone? Yup. Now that's a nightmare.

It's a radical act of love (and self-love) to fill out a healthcare proxy form. It's free, and you can do it right now in pajama pants. Bonus points if you mail a blank copy to a friend and start a little queer proxy chain of care.

Find Michigan-specific forms at bit.ly/michdirectives and learn more about the healthcare proxy process and protecting your rights as an LGBTQ+ person in a healthcare setting at bit.ly/readmoretoprotect.

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Local Trans Community Faces Uncertain Future as Anti-Trans Pressure Mounts

How Planned Parenthood clinic closures will impact access to gender-affirming care

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

For Michigan's trans community, access to life-sustaining healthcare is growing increasingly precarious as Planned Parenthood of Michigan prepares to shutter four health centers amid what advocates describe as an unprecedented assault on transgender rights.

The April 10 announcement that clinics in Jackson, Petoskey, Marquette and one Ann Arbor location will close by April 30 has sent ripples of fear through a community already struggling to maintain access to essential gender-affirming care — leaving some scrambling to stockpile medications and others facing hours-long drives for basic healthcare services.

The clinic closures come at a time when transgender Americans face mounting threats nationwide. Independent journalist Erin Reed, who tracks anti-transgender legislation, describes the situation as "unraveling at an alarming pace" with medical care for both transgender youth and adults being "gutted, with entire states seeing widespread service shutdowns."

Recent actions by the Trump administration have heightened these concerns. In January, President Trump issued an executive order that recognizes only "male" and "female" sexes and directs federal agencies to "end the Federal funding of gender ideology." The order mandated that the Department of Health and Human Services provide "clear guidance expanding on the sex-based definitions" within 30 days.

Roz Keith, executive director and founder of trans advocacy org Stand with Trans, has highlighted the profound emotional impact of these policy changes. "One of the most jarring concerns that's been voiced to me is that parents believe that their child will be motivated to take their life, because they will feel hopeless," Keith told Michigan Public in January. Parents are worried their "rights are being taken away, that they can no longer access gender-affirming care."

These federal actions are part of a broader pattern. While many state restrictions initially focused on transgender youth, lawmakers are increasingly targeting healthcare for transgender adults. According to a February report from Stateline, several states have introduced bills that would prohibit Medicaid coverage of gender-transition services, prevent state health professionals from providing care or bar public money for incarcerated adults seeking such care.

Meanwhile, the scale of anti-transgender legislation continues to grow. According to the Trans Legislation Tracker, 2024 was the fifth consecutive record-breaking year for anti-trans bills. Already in 2025, this trend is continuing, with hundreds of bills targeting transgender people under consideration nationwide.

"For all the promises that such policies would stop at the margins, the reality is clear: life as a transgender person in America is becoming unlivable for many," Reed writes, noting that many transgender people are considering leaving the country entirely. "When conservative leaders openly talk about 'eradication' and declare the elimination of all gender-affirming care their 'endgame,' the calculation many trans people make is a grim one — that safety may no longer be possible within U.S. borders."

Local trans community preparing for worst-case scenarios

As transgender Michiganders grapple with the Planned Parenthood clinic closures, they're doing so in an increasingly hostile national climate.

On April 14, the Department of Health and Human Services launched an online portal for "whistleblowers" to report medical providers who offer gender-affirming treatment to transgender people, including those operating within established legal state guidelines. The portal specifically encourages reporting any actions that conflict with President Trump's Executive Order 14187, titled "Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation," despite multiple federal judges having blocked this order. The administration released accompanying legal guidance on how to disclose sensitive information about doctors and patients, raising serious privacy concerns for transgender individuals seeking care.

Planned Parenthood of Michigan's upcoming clinic closures come after the Trump administration cut millions of dollars in federal funding for family planning through the Title X program. While closing some locations, Planned Parenthood of Michigan plans to expand hours for its Virtual Health Center for telehealth services, including birth control, medication abortions and gender-affirming healthcare.

"Our decision to restructure reflects months of strategic planning and careful financial analysis," Paula Thornton Greear, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Michigan, said in a news release. "These necessary changes strengthen PPMI's ability to adapt quickly in a challenging political landscape."

Nine Planned Parenthood state affiliates, including Michigan, received notices on April 8 that their Title X funding was being "temporarily withheld" due to "possible violations" of federal civil rights law and President Donald Trump's executive orders. The notices specifically mentioned "prohibitions on promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion and 'taxpayer subsidization of open borders'" as areas of concern.

Impact on care access

The Ann Arbor West clinic, set to close on April 30 and combine with Power Family Health Center about 15 minutes away, has been a crucial resource for many transgender individuals, but the situation is more dire for transgender patients in the Upper Peninsula.

Planned Parenthood is one of the leading providers of gender-affirming services nationwide and a critical lifeline for people living in rural and remote areas. Dr. Bhavik Kumar, medical director of primary and trans care at Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast, told NPR that over 35,000 patients across the country had sought gender-affirming hormone replacement therapy at Planned Parenthood clinics that year. The closure of the Marquette location will leave Michigan's entire Upper Peninsula more

than 100 miles from a Planned Parenthood clinic, with the next closest facility nearly five hours away in Traverse City.

In response to questions about the future of gender-affirming care and potential additional closures, Jo Greep, senior director of communications at Planned Parenthood of Michigan, told BTL, "Right now, we have no plans for additional closures or staffing reductions beyond what has already been announced. While we are facing an increasingly hostile political climate, we are making strategic decisions to adapt and continue serving our patients and to ensure our long-term sustainability as an organization."

"That said, elections have consequences, and this is what it looks like when politicians attack and attempt to defund Planned Parenthood," Greep continued. "If threats to our funding escalate, we will do what is necessary to protect our ability to provide care. For anyone concerned about access to sexual and reproductive health care, the best way to prevent further disruptions is to demand accountability from our elected leaders."

In the face of increasing pressure from the Trump administration, Emme Zanotti, senior director of movement building and political affairs at Equality Michigan, told BTL that she remains appreciative that Planned Parenthood of Michigan has not backed down from its commitment to trans and gender diverse people in Michigan. "If that holds true, even under threats of significant funding losses, that level of fortitude is applause-worthy — to say the least," she added.

> *"Moving to another state, or even out of the country, is on my mind and most of my close friends' minds given the state of everything."*
>
> — Jaclyn Lahti, local trans community member

Broader concerns

A situation developing in Arizona offers a troubling preview of what could happen in other states. On April 12, Planned Parenthood of Arizona announced it was pausing gender-affirming care services for all patients, including adults, in response to a letter from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). On April 16, the organization rescinded its decision to pause gender-affirming care following intense backlash across the state, but residual fear remains.

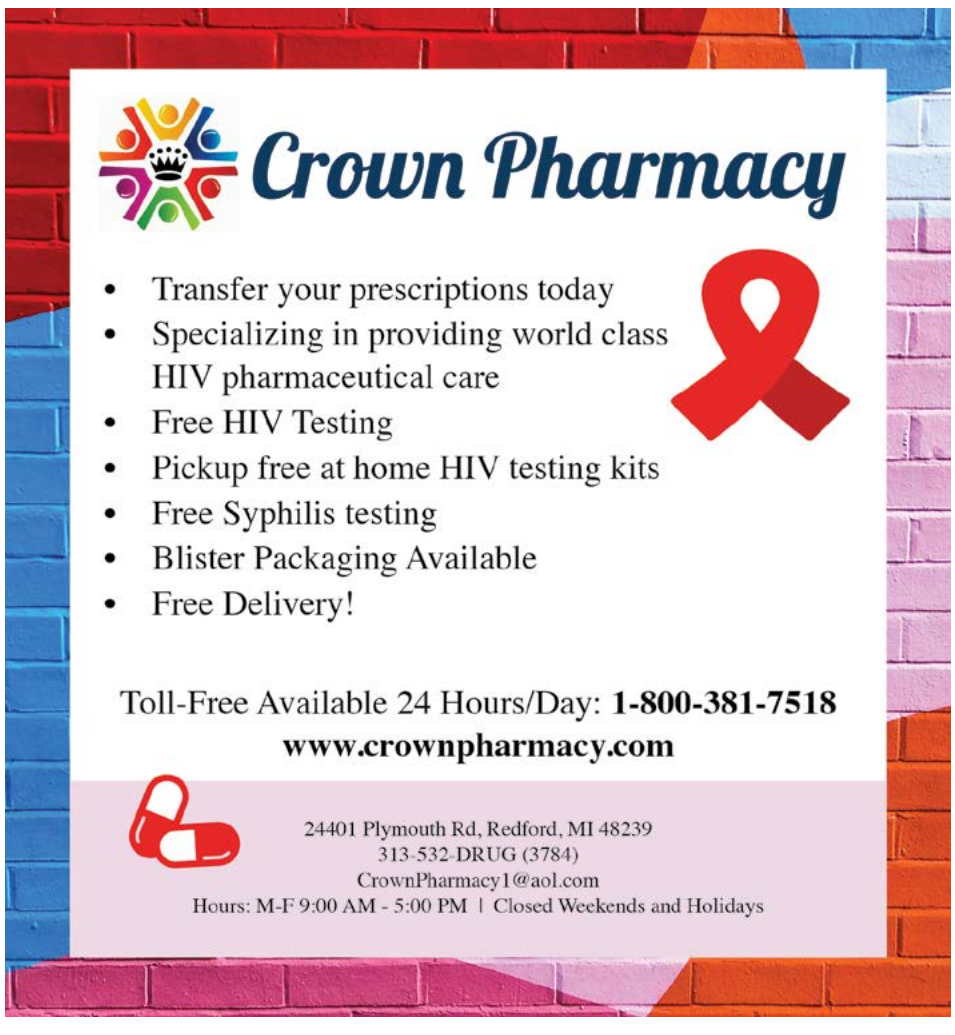
The CMS letter cites a 1978 regulation restricting federal funding for sterilization procedures on individuals under 21, despite the fact that gender-affirming care for adults rarely causes permanent sterilization. Many transgender patients retain fertility after temporarily stopping hormone therapy, and fertility counseling is routinely offered to patients seeking such care.

The use of this decades-old regulation to pressure healthcare centers appears to be part of a wider strategy. The Trump administration had previously issued an executive order barring gender-affirming care for anyone under 19 — a category that includes legal adults — though that order has been blocked by multiple courts. The administration has appealed several of these cases.

Community response

While conducting research for this

See **Planned Parenthood**, page 26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From Oak Park to Broadway: Michigan's Theater Kid Comes Home

'Rent' producer Jeffrey Seller returns to Detroit with coming-of-age memoir

BY BRIDGETTE M. REDMAN

Jeffrey Seller, one of America's most successful Broadway producers, returns home May 6 to launch his book "Theater Kid: A Broadway Memoir," a story deeply rooted in his Detroit upbringing and journey as a gay man who revolutionized the theater industry.

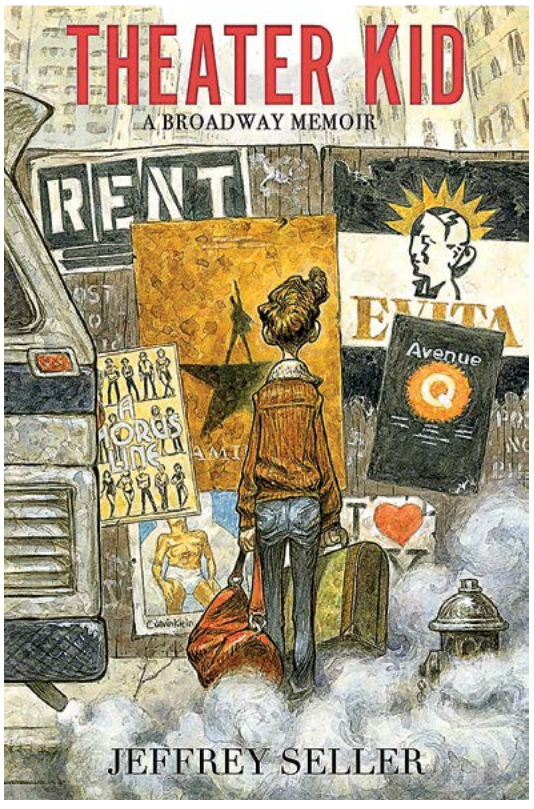
Seller will join actor Douglas Sills at the Berman Center at the Jewish Detroit Community Center for a conversation about his life and work. "This is going to be a great homecoming event in which we can all share how important our temples, churches, theaters, schools, proms, homes and parks have been to us throughout our lives," Seller told BTL.

The Oak Park native isn't just another check-writing producer — he's a hands-on collaborator who has fundamentally changed Broadway. Seller produced groundbreaking musicals including "Rent," "Avenue Q," "In the Heights" and "Hamilton," with his shows winning 22 Tony Awards and grossing more than $4.6 billion. He holds the distinction of being the only producer to have brought to life two Pulitzer Prize-winning musicals with both "Hamilton" and "Rent."

Detroit shapes nearly every aspect of Seller's identity. "I can't separate who I am with where I came from," Seller said. "I can't separate who I am from being born at Sinai Hospital, being adopted three months later, growing up in a Jewish household that was getting poorer by the year and being a gay kid who fell in love with theater. It all happened in Oak Park."

In "Theater Kid," Seller details a challenging childhood in the 1970s and early '80s. A motorcycle accident left his father brain-damaged and without short-term memory. While unflinching about his parents' shortcomings, Seller shows compassion for them as struggling human beings who tried their best despite their failures.

Jeffrey Seller. Courtesy photo



Seller identifies Royal Oak's Stagecrafters and the Fisher Theatre as places where he discovered his lifelong passion. These venues helped shape the artistic aesthetic that would later inform his producing career. "When I think back to the shows I was most powerfully affected by and informed by as a kid, the first was 'Chorus Line,'" Seller recalled. "It was a contemporary musical in which the characters were revealing the most profound feelings and secrets about themselves."

The impact is evident in his career choices. "If you look at my musicals 'Rent,' 'Avenue Q' and 'In the Heights,' they all fit into that mold," Seller said.

Though Detroit fostered his love of theater, Seller knew he needed to leave to fulfill his dreams. "I didn't know anybody in New York; I didn't know how to do it," Seller said of a summer after his sophomore year at the University of Michigan. "Of course, the answer, which the book reveals, is you just put one foot in front of the other. You get one foot on the first rung of the ladder and then pull yourself up."

When Seller arrived in New York in the mid-'90s, he tackled two significant Broadway challenges. First was the lack of support for new talent and young creators — no one was holding the door open for people like Jonathan Larson, who would go on to create "Rent."

The second challenge was ticket affordability. "I was 31 years old and I could barely afford a ticket," Seller said. "We wanted to make sure everybody could afford it in some way, shape or form."

This led to Seller's revolutionary $20 ticket lottery, replacing the existing student rush tickets that relegated budget-conscious theatergoers to the worst seats. "Let's do it in the first two rows so that those people who paid $20 and showed up will bring the greatest amount of enthusiasm," he recalled of the idea. "Their infectious enthusiasm will start in the first two rows and take us all the way to the last rows of the balcony."

Seller's work with Larson opened doors for a new generation of Broadway creators. "It opened the floodgates for many future young authors to work on their own terms at their own unique shows, whether that was Lin-Manuel doing 'In the Heights' and then 'Hamilton' or Benj [Pasek] and Justin [Paul] doing 'Dear Evan Hansen,'" Seller said. "All these contemporary, wonderful Broadway musicals are on the shoulders of Jonathan Larson and 'Rent.'"

"Theater Kid" also chronicles Seller's coming-of-age as a gay man without language to express his identity or guidance to understand it. With remarkable vulnerability, he details discovering his sexuality, often in confusion. While he lacked support in understanding his attractions, he encountered acceptance from those who mattered most.

Though his productions revolutionized how LGBTQ+ characters and stories appeared on stage, Seller said he didn't set out with an agenda. "When I'm in the theater, whether I'm looking at a new show or an old show, I want to be surprised," Seller said. "I want to feel deeply about the show. I want to have my ear pricked in a whole new way."

He cites moments like hearing "Light My Candle" in an early "Rent" workshop or "If You Were Gay" at an "Avenue Q" workshop as transformative experiences. The first time he met Larson, who was performing what would later become "Tick, Tick … Boom!," Seller felt profound connection despite their different orientations. "He was a straight guy, but I felt like he was telling my life story," Seller said.

Seller's return to Detroit is particularly fitting as he maintains strong local connections — his partner, Yuval Sharon, is Detroit Opera's artistic director. Both of Seller's parents passed away before reading his memoir, his father 10 years ago and his mother just after the book was completed, following cancer treatments.

"I wrote this book as an act of service and inspiration for people who feel like they're outsiders," Seller said. "I wrote this book about feeling like an outsider and how I found my way in."

Israeli soldier Yoav Atzmoni in an image posted on Instagram by the Israeli government in November 2023 with the caption: "The first ever pride flag raised in Gaza." Photo: Instagram/@stateofisrael

Why I'm a Proud Queer for Palestine

On the hypocrisy of Netanyahu's queer concern and why the U.S. is responsible for Palestinian genocide

BY HANK KENNEDY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would shake his head at this title. During Netenyahu's speech to Congress last year, he took time for an interesting aside. The accused war criminal declared that "Gays for Gaza" were like "chickens for KFC."

Netanyahu's statement acknowledges deplorable treatment of queer people in Gaza, but the Prime Minister's concern for us "chickens" is hypocritical given the anti-queer statements of many Israeli politicians supporting his government.

Netanyahu's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich labeled himself "a proud homophobe," while also denigrating Pride parades as "worse than bestiality." Other Israeli parliamentarians in the governing coalition have made similar comments. Yitzhak Pindrus: "I must prevent gay Pride and prevent this movement." Almog Cohen: "[T]he Pride parade is a completely animalistic parade of unbridled and unrestrained sex partying while harassing boys and minors..."

Israeli policies are similarly anti-queer. In 2020, the far-right deputy mayor of Jerusalem removed a Pride flag from the U.S. embassy. Same-sex marriages are not performed in Israel and 56% of Israelis oppose same-sex marriage. There may be worse to come if politicians in the ruling coalition get their way. Orit Strook argued that doctors should be able to refuse to treat gay patients. Avi Moaz compared gay people to Nazis and wants to resurrect the banned, barbaric practice of conversion therapy. With a cursory reading of what the far-right coalition says in public, "Gays for Israel" sounds like "Chickens for KFC."

Pinkwashing: Using queer rights as propaganda

Despite all this, the Israeli government has presented an image of Israel as a queer-friendly paradise, a process known as "pinkwashing." ACT UP historian and Jewish Voice for Peace member Sarah Schulman defines pinkwashing as "the cynical use of queer people's hard-won gains by the Israeli government in an attempt to rebrand themselves as progressive, while continuing to violate international law and the human rights of Palestinians." She argues the "goal of pinkwashing is to justify Israel's policies of

See **Queer Palestine**, page 23

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Finding Your People: An Insider's Guide to Queer Community in Washtenaw County

Destination Ann Arbor's Maria Skrzynski shares her journey to connection and gives tips on how to create your own

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

When Maria Skrzynski moved to Ypsilanti in 2014, she knew almost no one. Today, as a content strategist for Destination Ann Arbor and a deeply connected member of the local LGBTQ+ community, she's become an expert on how to build meaningful connections in Washtenaw County.

"I graduated from Eastern Michigan University and then relocated to Ypsilanti permanently in 2014," Skrzynski explains. Now with over six years at Destination Ann Arbor, where she creates meaningful content and campaign strategies for Destination Ann Arbor and Ypsi Real, Skrzynski has an insider's perspective on finding community as a queer person in the region.

Ypsi Pride 2024. Courtesy photo

Creating community when you're new

For newcomers feeling isolated, Skrzynski's approach is refreshingly proactive. When she first arrived, rather than waiting for community to find her, she created it herself.

"When I moved here, I went out and created my own Meetup group called Ypsilanti 20s and 30s," she recalls. "I met a lot of people that I'm friends with to this day. And some people that met in the group got married, which was really cool to see!"

For those specifically seeking queer community, Skrzynski recommends starting where she did — with local Pride events.

"I started with Ypsi Pride," she says. "I just put myself out there and really dove in. I was there for about four years, including through the pandemic, where we had to come up with innovative ways to celebrate."

This involvement became her gateway to a broader network. "That really connected me to the queer community here; once you're in it, you realize it's everywhere," she stresses. "You just have to be willing to put yourself out there, and everyone is happy to have you here."

Skrzynski acknowledges that taking the first step can be difficult, especially for introverts. Still, "it's always one of those things where I'm really glad I went," she says, describing a particularly memorable Pride afterparty. "Everyone was there and dancing, and it felt good and safe — and that really matters."

From gay bars to wellness studios: finding your space

For visitors or newcomers looking to connect with the local queer community, Skrzynski offers specific recommendations based on her personal experiences. "All of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti are welcoming, but finding specific places often depends on personal recommendations," she advises. "There are some easy places to start, like Uplift Ann Arbor."

Uplift, which opened in late 2024, serves as both a neighborhood bar during weekdays and a lively club on weekends. The venue emerged partly in response to the closing of Aut Bar in 2020, which had long been a cornerstone of the local LGBTQ+ community.

For ongoing events, Skrzynski points to North Star Lounge. This venue hosts weekly LGBTQ+ nights, featuring a rotating mix of DJs, trivia, karaoke and bingo in an inclusive atmosphere.

"The Regal Beagle Ypsilanti has been nailing it with really unique and inclusive gatherings," she adds, highlighting a local spot that, like many, may not be explicitly labeled as queer spaces but are intentionally welcoming.

Beyond nightlife, Skrzynski recommends wellness spaces like queer-affirming Zion Well, which offers yoga and meditation classes in both Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor, creating calming spaces for mindfulness practices. Skrzynski says the studio "is very intentional about what they provide for the queer community."

When navigating everyday spaces, Skrzynski pays attention to subtle signals of inclusivity and encourages local businesses and organizations to be intentional about providing those signals. These visual cues can transform ordinary businesses into spaces where queer individuals can feel recognized and welcomed.

"It could be as simple as a sticker, putting that visibility forward and letting us know how inviting you are when you come through the door," she explains. "It just makes for an open community space. Not everyone is comfortable putting up a sign or a flag, so when you see that, it's very wholesome."

Oddities and adventures: exploring beyond the norm

Part of finding community is discovering shared interests that go beyond identity. Skrzynski's weekend

recommendations highlight unique experiences that foster connection through the unexpected.

"I like unusual places," she reveals. "There's a shop called This, That & the ODDer Things that has all kinds of oddities like taxidermy and nearby there's another shop and artist co-op, Twisted Things, full of crafty items. The Holy Bones Artisan Markets in Ypsi puts on monthly vendor markets that are just awesome."

For relaxed socializing, she recommends cocktail lounge Bitter Truth, which combines barbecue and cocktails, and Peridot, which she describes as having great vibes. Seasonal events like the Ann Arbor Farmers Market's Flower Day on Memorial Day Weekend also create opportunities for community building around shared interests.

Having watched the local LGBTQ+ community evolve over a decade, Skrzynski offers perspective on how it's changed.

"Ann Arbor has a lot of trailblazing history when it comes to human rights, especially in the queer space," she notes. "We've had some queer-friendly places close, and so it does get more challenging — especially if you don't want to go clubbing on a Friday night."

Despite these challenges, she sees strength in how the community has adapted. "As a whole, the community has become more inclusive and welcoming. We're more resilient, and people have become more intentional about planning activities."

Resources and final advice

For those planning to explore the area's queer community, Skrzynski recommends starting with online resources.

"I definitely recommend checking out Destination Ann Arbor's new LGBTQ+ travel page," she suggests (found at annarbor.org/plan/lgbtq-travel). This resource provides curated information about inclusive venues, events and attractions throughout the county.

She also points to the Jim Toy Community Center as a valuable resource. Named after the legendary local LGBTQ+ icon, the center provides information, education, social events and advocacy for the queer community and allies in Washtenaw County. "And of course, there's Pride Source!" she adds.

Ann Arbor has earned recognition for its LGBTQ+ inclusivity, with the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index ranking it the most LGBTQ+ friendly city in Michigan. The annual Ann Arbor Pride and Ypsi Pride celebrations provide key opportunities to connect with the community.

For those new to the area or visiting and wanting to connect with queer community, Skrzynski's advice is simple but powerful: Show up, be present and be willing to step outside your comfort zone.

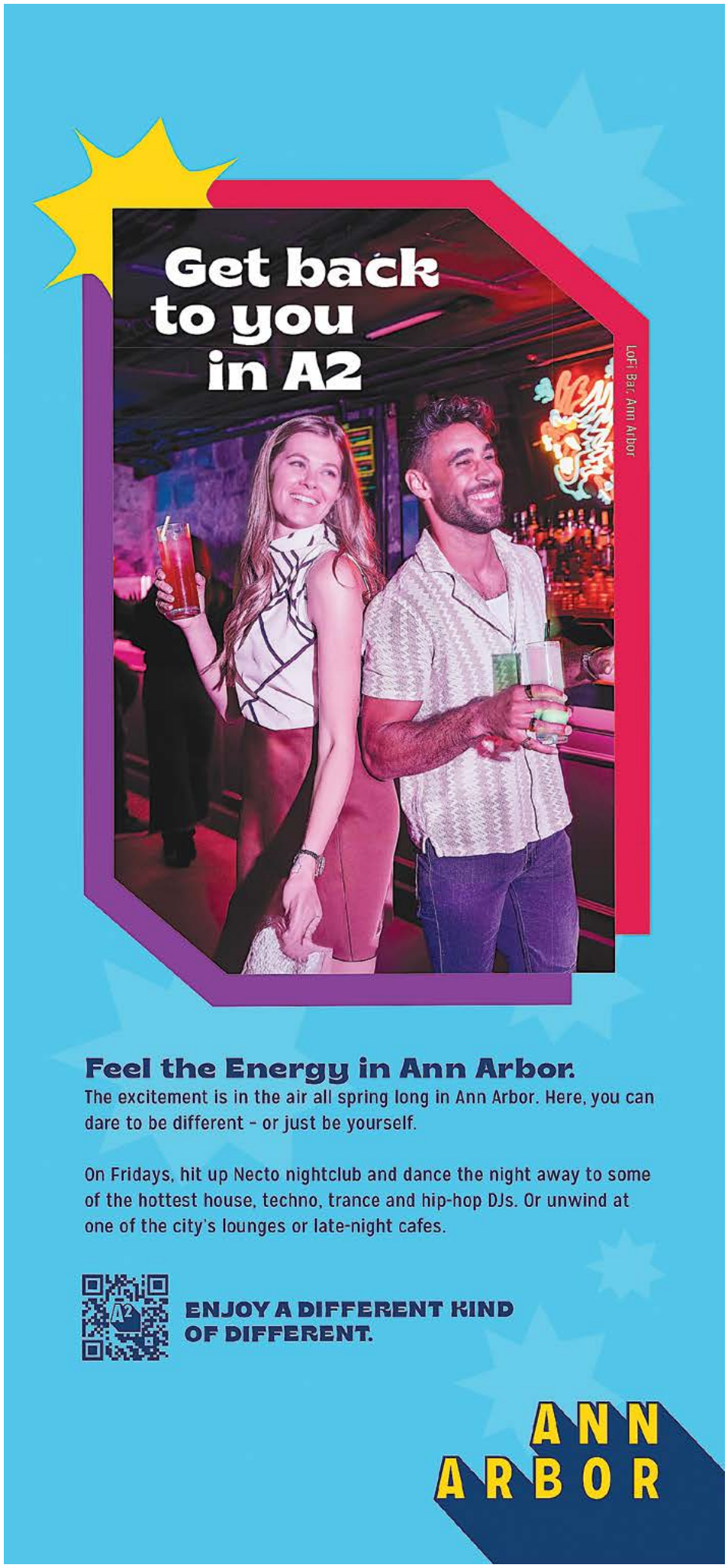
"It's incorporated throughout the area — just walking downtown and going into a shop, I'll notice things that make me feel safe and welcome," she says of the region's inclusive spirit.

Perhaps what makes Washtenaw County truly special, though, isn't just its established LGBTQ+ spaces but the community's openness to creating new ones. When reflecting on her experience founding her own meetup group and getting involved with Ypsi Pride, Skrzynski came to an important realization that encapsulates the spirit of the region: "I realized that if there's something you want to do in this area, people here will help make that happen."

In a world where finding belonging can sometimes feel like an insurmountable challenge, Skrzynski's journey offers both a roadmap and hope. Whether you're a longtime resident or just passing through, Washtenaw County's queer community stands ready not just to welcome you, but to help you create the connections you're seeking.

This content is made possible through our partnership with Destination Ann Arbor. For more information about LGBTQ+-friendly accommodations, events and attractions in the Ann Arbor area, visit annarbor.org.

Maria Skrzynski (right) and her partner, Dominique. Courtesy photo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ANN ARBOR

CREEP OF THE WEEK

Heinous Loser and Anti-Trans Bigot J.K. Rowling Can Choke on Her Cigar

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

My son's high school is doing some kind of Harry Potter production for their spring play and I really wish they had chosen something else. I was trying to rationalize it in my brain, thinking maybe they let the kids choose the play and most kids probably don't know that J.K. Rowling is a truly terrible person who has made harming transgender people her personal crusade. But even if that is true, this decision didn't happen without adults.

It's hard to believe that there is anyone on earth who doesn't know about Rowling's bigotry. But it is not hard to believe that there are people on earth who do know and do not care.

And while someone like Rowling most definitely deserves to be cancelled, things are, unfortunately, mostly going her way lately.

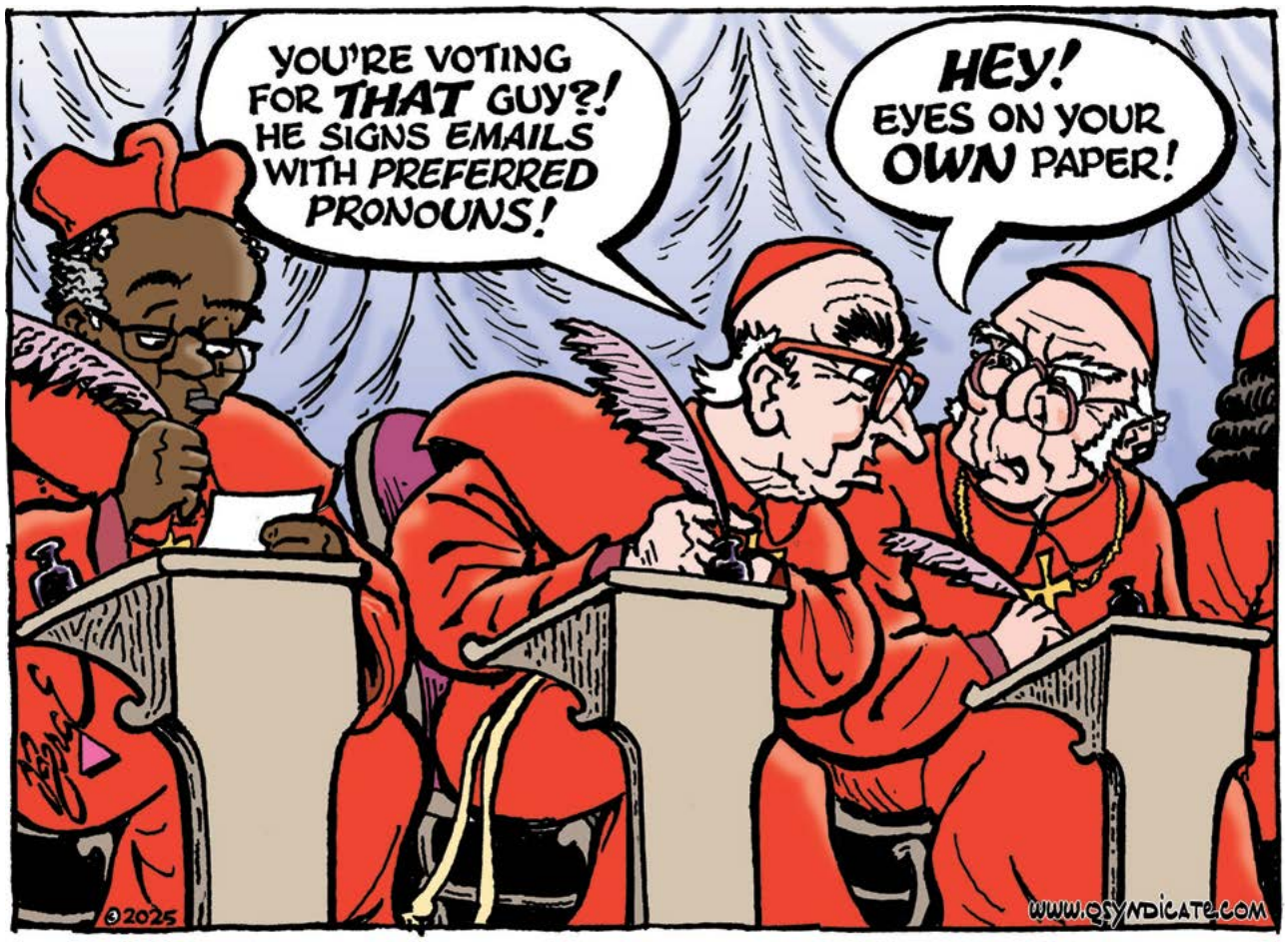
Case in point: on April 16, Rowling posted a photo of herself on social media smoking a cigar and holding a glass of wine with the caption, "I love it when a plan comes together. #SupremeCourt #WomensRights."

And what might that plan be?

As Katelyn Burns explains on MSNBC, "The 'plan' Rowling was referencing was a U.K. Supreme Court judgment that ruled trans women should not be considered women, essentially wiping out decades of civil rights advances for British transgender people."

The Court's ruling claims that sex is "binary," and that "a person is either a woman or a man." This is not only socially harmful, but it's not even true scientifically.

Yet here is the author of some of the world's most beloved children's books literally celebrating a viciously anti-trans Supreme Court ruling. That she would be pleased with this ruling is not a surprise. She's been publicly anti-trans since at least 2018.



> *Guess what? You can live a full and happy life without Harry Potter. Trans people cannot live a full and happy life stripped of human rights.*

But this time she's taken things up a notch. She donated over $94,000 to For Women Scotland, the anti-trans group that filed the lawsuit.

Cool way for her to spend money. No doubt some of that money came from trans and nonbinary kids who bought her books and watched her movies because they identified so strongly with her work.

Unsurprisingly, there has been public backlash against Rowling since the ruling.

Actor David Tennant, who played Bartemius Crouch Jr. in the fourth Harry Potter movie, was asked in a recent interview why he supports trans rights. He compared what's happening to trans people now to laws that used to ban "the promotion of homosexuality" in the U.K. under Margaret Thatcher.

"We look back on that now as a medieval, absurd thing to try and say," Tennant said, "and I think the way the trans community is being demonised and othered is exactly the same."

This is not his first time calling out transphobes. Last year he called them "a tiny bunch of little whinging fuckers who are on the wrong side of history."

Actor Pedro Pascal called Rowling's celebration of the ruling "awful disgusting shit" and "heinous loser behavior."

Truly cannot think of a more perfect use for the word "heinous," especially when paired with "loser."

"I can't think of anything more vile and small and pathetic than terrorizing the smallest, most vulnerable community of people who want nothing from you, except the right to exist," Pascal posted on Instagram.

Pascal is a long-time outspoken ally of trans people. He has a trans sister, Lux Pascal.

But guess what? You don't have to have a trans sister, or even know a single trans person, to recognize that trans rights are literally human rights. It honestly isn't that hard.

I have never read any of the Harry Potter books nor have I seen the movies. It has never interested me. But come on, there are so many other books to read besides Harry Potter. I hate that the very creator of this series has poisoned it for the millions of people who love it so much.

But guess what? You can live a full and happy life without Harry Potter. Trans people cannot live a full and happy life stripped of human rights.

"This ruling may have been a significant setback, but there is still nothing that can stop us from simply existing as trans people," writes Burns. "The world has always had trans people, and always will. The J.K. Rowlings of the world come and go, but trans people are eternal, and that feels like a very comforting thought here in the eye of the storm in 2025."

Transgender people deserve much more comfort than that, but Burns is right. Hate cannot and will not erase transgender people.

Oh, and one more thing: Katelyn Burns is a trans journalist doing very important work. Support her on Patreon.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

LGBTQ+ Capitol Day 2025: Your Voice Matters in the Fight for Equality

Michigan's LGBTQ+ and ally community will gather in what organizers predict could be record numbers on May 14 for the 2025 Statewide LGBTQ+ Capitol Day in Lansing. Organized by Equality Michigan and the Michigan LGBTQ+ Commission, this landmark event is expected to be the largest LGBTQ+ advocacy day in state history.

"This should be a remarkable day of community gathering, solidarity and getting to know LGBTQ+ and allied people from across the state," organizers said in an announcement. The event is specifically designed to combat "increasing attacks on the community, especially frequent anti-trans attacks."

Participants will attend scheduled meetings with elected officials after a morning program featuring guest speakers and advocacy training. To help guide those new to advocacy work, all attendees will receive comprehensive materials, including talking points on critical, federally targeted issues like gender-affirming care and HIV prevention.

The day begins at 8 a.m. at Grewal Hall in downtown Lansing, with meetings arranged so participants can head home before 2:30 p.m. A virtual prep meeting will be held May 8. No advocacy experience is necessary. As organizers emphasize, "When we win, everyone wins!"

Register at bit.ly/2025capitolday.

Michigan State Capitol building in Lansing.

Pentagon Resumes Health Care for Transgender Troops

The Pentagon will resume providing gender-affirming medical care for transgender service members following court orders that struck down Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's restrictions as unconstitutional, according to a memo obtained by Politico.

Federal judges ruled in March that the policy was "a thinly veiled ban on transgender people that violated the Constitution." The court ordered the military to refrain from forcing out more than 1,000 transgender troops and to resume providing for their medical care, including surgical procedures and voice and hormone therapy.

The administration is appealing the decision while complying with orders to continue care and retain transgender troops. Democrats have criticized the administration's targeting of trans military members, with Sen. Tammy Duckworth noting, "the last thing our nation should be doing is rejecting patriotic Americans who are ready and willing to serve."

Golden O'Hara-Polo. Photo: Instagram/@goldenohara

Michigan Trans Performer Golden O'Hara-Polo Dies at 29

Trans performer Golden O'Hara-Polo, whose performances inspired Southeast Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, died April 4 at age 29.

Her final appearance was at Five15 in Royal Oak during a Transform fundraiser benefiting the Michigan ACLU, a cause she championed throughout her career.

Five15 announced her passing on social media, calling her "a guiding light as a performer, as a legal mind, and as someone who deeply believed in the power of unity, truth, and justice."

Friends and venues remember O'Hara-Polo for her generosity, community dedication and her ability to transform performances into magical experiences. Michigan Drag Brunch posted that she "exuded beauty, positivity and kindness."

In early 2024, O'Hara-Polo came out as transgender on Instagram, writing, "Life is short, don't love for anyone else but yourself."

Equality Michigan Announces New Board Leadership

Equality Michigan has appointed new leadership to its board of directors, including Kerrin Kramer as Board Chair and Tracy Hall as Board Secretary. The organization also welcomed two new members: John LoPorto and Daniel Vander Ley. Executive Director Erin Knott wrote in an announcement, "At a time when LGBTQ+ rights are under attack, this Board is ready to rise to the challenge." Knott thanked outgoing chair Buzz Thomas for his "visionary leadership during a critical era."

Queer Prom at Ypsi Freight House

The Queer Prom, hosted by Cheers to Queers, returns May 10 to Ypsilanti Freighthouse (8 p.m.–midnight), offering the classic experience with an LGBTQ+ twist. Enjoy cocktails and mocktails from Vertex Coffee Roasters, a glowing dance floor courtesy of Whoa Disco Floors, and even putt-putt by Putt-R-Round. Semi-formal attire is encouraged but not required. This annual event typically sells out, so reserve your spot now at bit.ly/42RtghY.

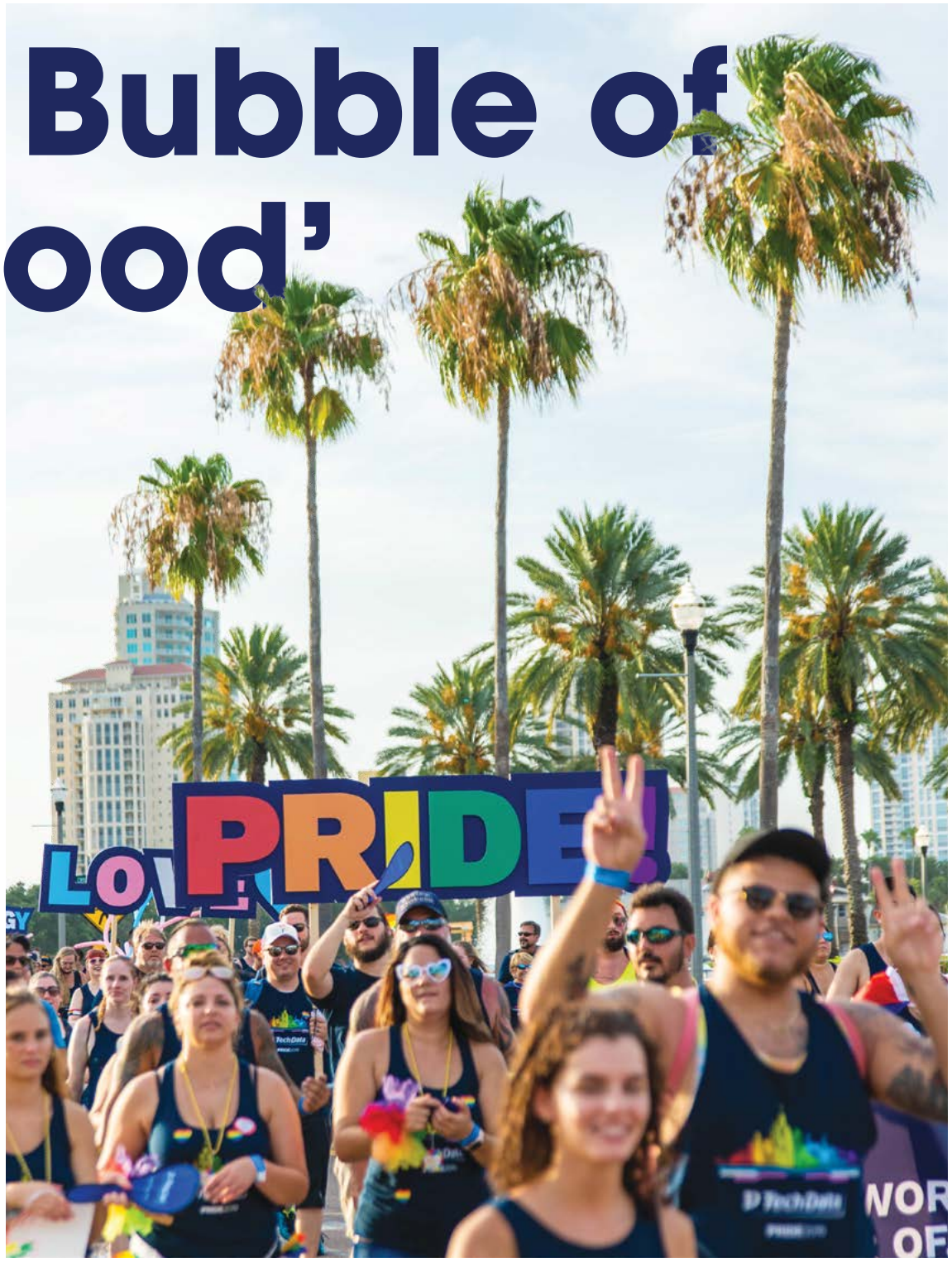
Say Goodbye to 'Heartstopper'

"Heartstopper" fans, grab your tissues as we prepare to say goodbye to teen lovebirds Nick Nelson and Charlie Spring in a series finale movie. Kit Connor and Joe Locke aren't just starring — they're stepping up as executive producers. Will their love survive university separation anxiety and long-distance relationship challenges? Filming starts this summer, but we'll have to wait until the 2026 release before we can plan our movie night!

Kit Connor and Joe Locke. Photo: Netflix

A Queer Bubble of ‘Siblinghood’

How St. Petersburg, Florida defies the state’s anti-LGBTQ+ reputation



Pridegoers gather in St. Pete, which hosts one of the biggest Pride festivals in the U.S. Photo: Visit St. Pete-Clearwater

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

It’s easy to dismiss Florida as merely ground zero for anti-queer legislation; after all, the state earned an Advisory Warning from Equality Florida in 2023 — this before similar federal actions against the LGBTQ+ community followed. Yet my arrival in St. Petersburg revealed a surprising contrast: I landed in the heart of the city during the inaugural Winter Pride, a weeklong celebration held in February openly embracing the LGBTQ+ community in full force.

Checking into the adults-only Mari Jean Hotel, I soon found myself amid a boisterous crowd of LGBTQ+ revelers enthusiastically flinging bologna slices at “RuPaul’s Drag Race” winner Jimbo’s cartoonish figure within the hotel’s popular poolside bar, Cocktail. When one slice smacked against her breastplate like some absurdist game of pin the tail on the donkey, the cognitive dissonance struck me: Was this really Florida, the birthplace of “Don’t Say Gay” legislation? The answer, as I discovered, is that even the reddest states harbor vibrant pockets of bologna-tossing rebellion.

The Mari Jean, which opened in 2023, occupies a prime corner lot in the Grand Central District, St. Pete’s unofficial gayborhood. This vibrant area has served as an LGBTQ+ cultural hub since the 1980s and ’90s, organically growing with LGBTQ-owned businesses, bars and community spaces. Given its decades of colorful history and celebration, this district has undoubtedly witnessed its fair share of outrageous antics.

In this unexpected enclave of acceptance, I didn’t feel like I was living inside the troubling headlines about Florida. Instead, I was being warmly embraced by a community that defied the state’s reputation — on my first night, I was even led to the Grand Central Brewhouse across the street by two kind locals in their 60s who insisted I try their coffee stout.

All down Central Avenue, rainbow flags adorn shops and restaurants. The Mari Jean Hotel stands as a bold statement itself, with an unmissable mural on its exterior depicting two men intimately cozying up in a pool — a public celebration of queer identity that feels both defiant and perfectly at home in this progressive Sunshine State haven.

For co-owner David Fischer, the multiplex, which includes Cocktail and a new lounge called The Ball (featuring dancers in showers, it truly lives up to its “pop art paradise” description), is an extension of not just who he is but where he came from. Being raised by Catholic conservative parents who “would much rather tell you I’m gay than tell you I didn’t vote Republican” — plus, not coming out until he was 31 — was partly the catalyst for turning an old building previously used as a nursing home into something meaningful for the community: “I want to give people that space that I didn’t have,” Fischer tells me.

In his nine years as a full-time resident of St. Pete, Fischer has seen the city develop considerably — his Mari Jean property was one of the earliest renovations on that corner of Central Avenue. Down toward the pier is his home decor shop, ZaZoo’d, now located at 633 Central Ave.

“I can even think back to 12 years ago when we opened ZaZoo’d down at 500 block and Central: It was pretty bad and pretty desolate from businesses being there,” he recalls. “It was just starting to come back down that way. We were on the front end of developing down there. And once we started with the Mari Jean and the place across the street, Grand Central Brewhouse and LALA Karaoke started to build. That helped the resurgence of the whole neighborhood.”

St. Pete: ‘magical’

For Rachel Covello, finding a wedding ring on the ground near a parking meter on her first night in St. Pete made her feel like she’d landed in a special place. “I picked it up,” she recalls, keeping it until returning later to the meter. There, she met its tearful owner. “He was emotional and crying when I showed him the ring. “That was my first impression of St. Pete,” Covello says, calling the city “magical.”

That feeling — of connection, of belonging, of things somehow falling into place — is what draws so many LGBTQ+ people to St. Pete. In a state where queer and trans communities are increasingly under political attack, this city stands as a sanctuary of inclusion and joy. Like a lost treasure discovered unexpectedly, St. Petersburg offers the acceptance many have searched for their entire lives.

Covello moved from Pennsylvania to St. Pete seven years ago. She runs the website

OutCoast.com, an LGBTQ+ travel and fashion blog, and OutCoastTV on YouTube. During a recent talk she hosted with St. Pete's LGBT Chamber, she said "one of the things we all agreed on was that St. Pete's like a playground for adults."

"It was the best way to summarize what it really is, because I feel that way," she says. "There's always something to do, whether it's a museum or dining out or art. The art community here is huge. I feel like I found my place here, like I can fit in here regardless of who I am."

Evelyn Long, 24, feels she's already built the kind of life that would make her younger Ohio self gasp with envy. Working as the social media manager and executive assistant for Fischer's businesses, Long escaped what she calls the "pretty depressed and constricted" suburbs of Dayton eight years ago. Now she's living her best cottagecore-meets-queer fantasy in Gulfport — a "gay town" bordering St. Pete that she lovingly characterizes as full of "old lesbians" — complete with her own chicken and turkey as housemates.

Even though she acknowledges feeling acceptance and support from her family, "I absolutely hated it," she says about living in Dayton, her voice tinged with the lingering memory of those confined days. "I grew up really resenting where I lived, and I was really happy to move away. I had never really been in a bigger city before and I couldn't really believe how beautiful it was here. The

Mari Jean owner David Fischer. Courtesy photo

weather, people. It was a culture shock, for sure, but in a good way."

The vibrant tapestry of St. Pete's LGBTQ+ community has given Long profound insights into what makes this coastal haven so magnetic for those with similar backgrounds. "I think St. Pete, in general, attracts transplants and people who have come from different places. And the fact that it's a queer hub just kind of generates this community among people where there's this understanding that most of you have probably come from rural areas out of state and have chosen to live here." She describes the community feel in St. Pete as a "siblinghood."

In a political era that demands community mobilization, Long has seen a remarkable shift in how community members show up for those who need the most support. When she first arrived in St. Pete, much of the LGBTQ+ visibility and resources centered around gay men. Now, she's witnessing an inspiring surge of support networks specifically created for gender non-conforming and transgender individuals. The community isn't just adapting — it's meeting the moment with extraordinary initiative.

"I think people's resourcefulness is incredible," she says. "For example, yesterday someone I know peripherally from different queer events started a trans femme social group just out of nothing. And just a couple months ago, the same thing happened with a trans group."

The contrast with her early days in the area is striking. "When I moved here, there was no such thing as even a lesbian group that was doing this. It was very much like, you could go to Enigma and you could hang out with the gay men who may or may not frankly want you there, you don't really know."

Recently, Long has witnessed the community rallying in response to not just Florida's anti-queer legislation but federal policies, as LGBTQ+ individuals contend with targeted laws under the Trump administration. She also observes that St. Petersburg has experienced a demographic shift, with more conservative transplants choosing the area during the pandemic given its lack of lockdown restrictions.

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How an Impromptu Road Trip from Ohio to Michigan Helped Me Embrace My Sexuality

The dispensary run that became the first step in a seven-year journey to authenticity

BY KASANDRA FERGUSON

I would never consider Ohio beautiful. I live in Ireland now, near the north, and it meets every kitschy description: rolling hills, grazing area framed by stone fences and dotted with sheep, the nearby coast exhaling a cool, salty breeze over the town.

I come from farmland. Out where it's sticky and hot in the summer, teeth-crackingly cold in the winter; routinely, it smells of manure from the nearby fields. It's quiet and slow and distant. I made few friends in childhood, and when I returned home from college, most remained away. I socialized only with my parents and sister, slept in my childhood bed, and felt the past scratching at my skin like cheap fabric.

A town away lived an old friend, a woman who hadn't gone to college and shared a home with her girlfriend — both considered unnatural by locals: the former because she had no intention of studying a trade either, and the locals hated what they perceived to be a lack of work ethic; the latter fact for obvious reasons. I was the first of my friends to admit to the group as a whole that I was bisexual, as far as I remember, but the last to either date or sleep with a woman. My Christian roots clung tighter; my parents' influence hovered.

My friend's partner was L. They're no longer together, but they'd merged hard at that point. L sold weed and once gave me a brownie with shatter in it, a cannabis concentrate akin to dab resin, and it put me through the floor for an entire evening, panting shallowly like a wounded rabbit. The girlfriends felt fundamentally different to me, so — as any repressed 20-year-old would be — I was intimidated.

One day, L texted me. This was unheard of; her number wasn't even saved in my phone. She wanted company for a trip north over the border of Michigan to pick up something special from a dispensary. My friend was sick, slept-on-the-bathroom-floor type sick, and L couldn't face going on her own.

This didn't suit me. I've never enjoyed last-minute plans, I don't care for weed-motivated adventures, and I was extremely nervous about being pinned in a car for half a day with someone who remained a mystery to me. I originally said no, claiming I had some prior engagement. I thought it was settled.

Then she texted again.

She said her anxiety was so high that she couldn't bear going alone. The flat plains of Ohio seemed insurmountable — a feeling I've often had. My home felt like a sand trap, at times, one that was not only difficult to leave, but so opaque and oppressive that it made you feel there was no way to do so.

I conceded. I recall the brief slap of awkwardness when I slid into the car, clicked the seatbelt in, searched for a topic of discussion and stared solemnly out the window. Conversation became easier as the minutes gradually passed.

Time slipped, flowed faster, then flew. L bought me fast food that we ate in a parking lot before making for the border. We talked about our mutual friend, about movies, about my family, about the college I went to, about my goals, about her relationship history, about this and that, even if I don't recall the details. What I do remember, however, is the mood.

The surreal emptiness of Ohio farmland on a sunny summer afternoon felt both unsettling and inviting. It was still, bright — sweet, even, utterly upending the apathy it inspired in me daily. I felt that I was glimpsing something rare out in the countryside, something unburdened.

We hit the border, passing the plain road sign that marked Michigan, just as the sun began to set. We pulled into a comically obvious dispensary that practically winked at visitors crossing the border. Being just over the state line, its owners knew their market — people nipping over and back — and didn't bother trying to hide, like cheesy fireworks shops skirting the edges of Indiana.

I realized that day how close Michigan was to my hometown; it felt like an inaccessible destination, yet the afternoon passed in a blur. Eventually, with a comfortable, cheery energy I had lacked earlier in the day, she deposited me at home, the evening dark and balmy. She thanked me. We never hung out like that again, but I felt some invisible boundary between us had begun to fade.

The quick trip to Michigan wasn't a life-changing event. Afterward, L and I interacted more easily, more naturally. Eventually, the girlfriends broke up — like many lesbians I know, it was earth-shattering and catastrophic at first, but they're now friends again, even as they've moved on to other relationships. The ties between L and I, however, broke.

I only came out in recent months, seven years after this trip. I had a lot to overcome in an annoyingly long path to becoming comfortable with my sexuality. For years, it felt like the world would collapse if my parents ever knew, yet I told them over email one evening without a care. The stress had built and built and built — then caved in. Collapsed like a soufflé.

Nothing catalyzed my sudden coming out, really. It just happened. Yet when I think back to some of the most memorable parts of my past, things that made me feel like my sexuality was not a condemnation, I think of L: the sudden decision, the tension, then the giving in, so easy I hadn't noticed it.

Kasandra Ferguson is a writer and editor based in Ireland. Her poetry has appeared in Poetry Ireland Review, ROPES Literary Journal, Celestite Poetry, Typishly and Fat Éire. Her prose has been published by Tolka, Sans. PRESS, Write or Die Magazine, Oranges Journal, Business Insider and others.

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(Above) Cluegoers inside of Cocktail. (Right) "Drag Race" winner Jimbo performs at Cocktail during Winter Pride in February. Courtesy photos

◂ **St. Pete**
Continued from page 15

"So many conservative people fled here during Covid and Ron DeSantis's reign," she says.

Gov. DeSantis, who has enacted a record-breaking number of discriminatory measures against LGBTQ+ people into law, has only strengthened St. Pete's sense of queer community. "I do live in my gay bubble, and that makes me want to stand my ground," Long says, acknowledging gratitude for a job that allows her to unite community members with joyful experiences and connection. "People have fought to build queer community here, and the idea that people would move here and that would change that, it's like, 'Absolutely not.' So even though there's this big push against queer people right now, I feel like it's only given people more motivation to band together and create their own resources together."

Covello is part of that grassroots organizing, as she looks ahead to Sapphic St. Pete, a series of events taking place Nov. 1–9 that celebrates queer women, as well as nonbinary and trans people. Prior, on June 1, the city will host what has become one of the biggest Pride festivals in the Southeast, according to Visit St. Pete-Clearwater. In June 2023, the Tampa Bay Times reported that over half a million people attended local Pride events. Stanley Solomons, St. Pete Pride treasurer, told the Times, "It's like we put on Woodstock every year."

What impresses Long most is how the community continues to respond to political attacks with even stronger solidarity. Rather than retreating in the face of hostility, she's seen people come together to create vital support systems. She marvels at how community members have "pulled together their resources," establishing not just social connections but also mutual aid networks.

"The queer community is so resourceful here," she emphasizes. "They are being attacked from all angles, and yet, the only thing that generates from it is more community."

LGBTQ+ tourism remains vital to St. Pete's queer community

Despite the warm embrace of its local community, St. Petersburg's LGBTQ+ businesses still depend heavily on tourism to thrive. As rainbow-painted storefronts and Pride flags line the Grand Central District, these establishments represent more than just commercial ventures — they're cultural anchors in a state increasingly hostile to queer expression. St. Pete tells a different story than what we hear on the news given its local government, Fischer tells me.

"That our crazy governor has mandated stuff against the LGBTQ+ community is sad, but a lot of that we don't feel in the cities because this local government embraces us so well," he says. "It's a culture of acceptance around here, and it's very bizarre to see the exact opposite be felt from the outside."

Each visitor who chooses St. Pete as their destination contributes to a delicate economic ecosystem that allows these spaces to remain open and vibrant. "It's tough on businesses, for sure, that are gay-oriented and gay-owned. Because you're fighting that constant battle with the outside world, thinking one thing because that's what they see on the news and then feeling something totally different if you can get them here."

The city's unique position as a progressive enclave within Florida creates both opportunity and vulnerability. Events like Winter Pride don't just celebrate identity; they provide crucial revenue streams that help businesses weather slower seasons and political headwinds. For bar owners, hoteliers and shop proprietors like Fischer, each booking at the Mari Jean or each cocktail purchased at The Ball represents a vote of confidence in St. Pete's continued role as a queer-friendly city.

Tourism dollars enable these businesses to expand their community programming, hire more LGBTQ+ staff and maintain spaces where both locals and visitors can experience the freedom of authenticity.

"And so that's the key message that I know groups like Visit St. Clearwater have been working on: how we get that message out and make it not so scary to come and visit and realize how accepting it is," Fischer says.

The contrast between St. Pete's reality and Florida's reputation, which he admits is "pretty scary for people from the outside who only see one-sided views of it," couldn't be clearer when Fischer reflects on his choice to settle here: "St. Pete is the most gay-friendly city I've ever lived in, and I've lived in Philadelphia. I've lived in some cool places and traveled to

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See **St. Pete**, page 21

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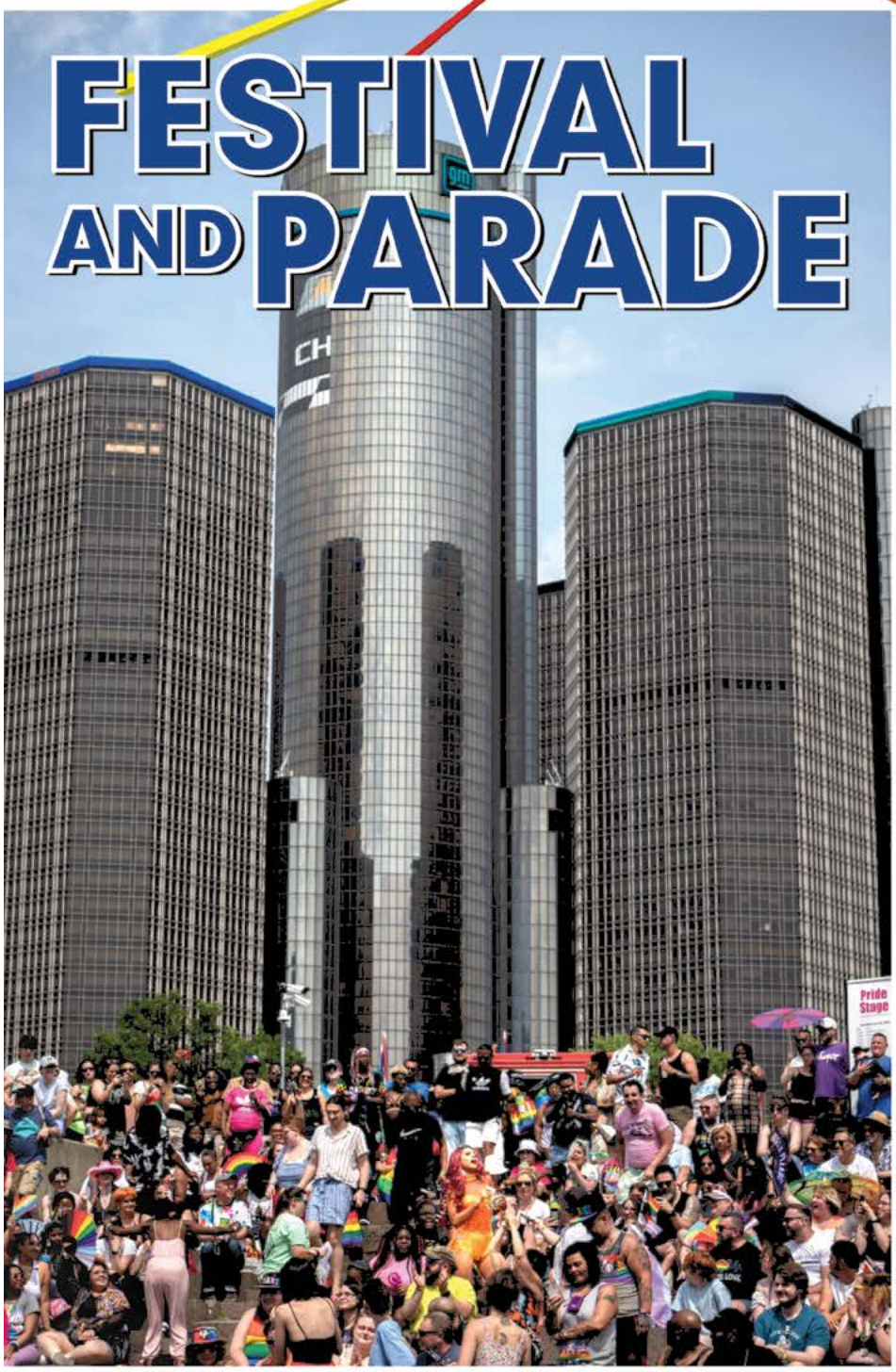

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MOTOR CITY PRIDE DETROIT

What Is Going on With Sarah McBride?

First openly trans U.S rep faces criticism from all sides — but she deserves our patience

BY ANNI ARBOUR

U.S. Rep. Sarah E. McBride (D – Delaware), is the first openly transgender person elected to the U.S. Congress. A historic and groundbreaking achievement, especially in the anti-trans climate that we are experiencing.

Since her election last November, Rep. McBride has been at the center of controversy. First, because she was the unnamed but obvious target of South Carolina Rep. Nancy Mace, who pushed for and got a Congressional rule change that dictated that people must use restrooms conforming to their assigned sex at birth in the Capitol building. And several times, her Republican colleagues have purposely misgendered McBride in committee meetings by referring to her as "Mr. McBride."

McBride's responses to these attacks and slurs — or more accurately, her lack of response to them — has frustrated and angered in the trans community. Recently, noted trans journalist Erin Reed has joined that group, criticizing McBride on Bluesky in a recent post.

In brief, Reed and others feel betrayed by McBride's refusal to confront her attackers. She did not directly respond to either Mace's spiteful bathroom rule or to the mean-spirited misgendering by Republicans.

Even worse, in her critics' eyes, in an answer to a question from an interviewer, McBride said, "We have to create more space in our tent. If, for instance, we want to have a majoritarian coalition — not just electorally, but specifically on issues around trans rights — that, by necessity, is going to have to include people who have a range of thoughts."

Taken out of context and read coldly, that appears to be a damning capitulation by McBride to the abuse she has endured. And it was this quote that apparently led Reed to write, "The people who went with 'Sarah McBride will actively collaborate with the destruction of transgender rights' turned out to be right."

That is a strong statement to make. And one I can't agree with, especially after reading the full article on the NOTUS site from which that quote was excised:

"The Delaware congresswoman has cautioned moderate Democrats that the tenor and tone of their comments — particularly on questioning trans athletes in sports, which is where most of the debate has focused — might inflame and splinter factions instead of being productive," the article reads. McBride's quotes are given more context here: "A binary choice between being all-on or all-off is not constructive for anyone," she said. "It impedes the very needed path toward winning electorally, winning hearts and minds and, most importantly, winning progress."

That is called pragmatism. And while it may inflame you or impede your desire to fight back, it is often the logical tack to take in tough situations.

Rep. Sarah McBride. Photo: Instagram/@sarahemcbride

For a moment, try to imagine yourself in McBride's shoes. She is the first and only openly transgender person elected to the U.S. Congress. Constantly in the spotlight, constantly being scrutinized. Every action and reaction of hers subject to inspection and commentary. A no-win position to be in.

To state the obvious — McBride represents not only the transgender community in Delaware, but all of her constituents in that state. That is 1.052 million people as of the last census. According to Williams Institute statistics, of that number, only about 7,000 of her constituents are transgender. Around 0.9%.

Like it or not, her job is to represent everyone effectively, not just that tiny minority. And to do so, she has to be able to develop workable relationships and coalitions with other legislators. Sometimes of both parties, as stomach-churning as that may be.

What should also be taken into account is McBride's time in office. She was sworn in three months ago. No similarly new legislator would be expected to have made much of a mark, so why put such an expectation upon McBride? The answer I got to that question by her naysayers is that they want her to say "SOMETHING! ANYTHING!" in support of transgender rights.

To an extent, I get it. She is the best-known trans person nationally right now (outside of entertainment), and surely her comments would be widely reported. Yet, for that very same reason, anything she says on the subject will be magnified and undoubtedly utilized by the right against us.

We only have to look back on last year's election to see how they weaponized Kamala Harris' past comments on transgender people against her. Their "Kamala is for they/them, President Trump is for you" ads cost her untold numbers of votes. Do you have any doubt that anything remotely controversial said by McBride wouldn't be similarly weaponized against her and our community?

It is easy for me or you or Erin Reed to express our anger at the open bigotry and discrimination we are undergoing. And I encourage us all to do so, whether it's by joining a group such as Trans Unity Coalition, contacting our legislators and advocating for our rights, or making videos and podcasts, or organizing peaceful protests and rallies, or posting on social media. There are myriad methods available to us. Sarah McBride is going about it in the way she believes is best for someone in her position.

Life often presents you with undesirable situations, with unwinable choices, or with impossible odds against you. We, the transgender community, are a tiny, marginalized population. We are facing a mammoth, organized and, unfortunately, legally elected enemy. This foe is coming at us by the enactment of laws aimed at denying us our rights and our very existence. I hate admitting that, and I know you do too.

The best defense we have in fighting this enemy is by pushing for legislation to advance our cause. Realistically, that means we need allies from outside our community. A reality that Rep. McBride is well aware of and is courting in the best way she knows how.

Which is why I ask our community to give her space and time to try it her way. She deserves our grace. For a while, at least.

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St. Pete
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some cool places, and I would tell you it's a very accepting city, and one of the biggest reasons I chose to retire here."

Beyond Fischer's gay paradise of entertainment and nightlife lies businesses such as The Garage, described as a "dive with Pride," and Enigma, a popular bar during the day and a full-on dance club at night. Both are located along Central Avenue, as is Lucky Star Lounge, a laid-back bar with a retro vibe. If you visit, the morning after your night out, grab a cold brew and pastry at Black Crow Coffee Co., just a few blocks from Central Avenue.

Walking there from the Mari Jean Hotel, I was immediately struck by its welcoming atmosphere. Door signs proudly proclaimed "Here We Say Gay" and "We Sell Banned Books," while inside, rainbow flags decorated the space alongside a powerful message: "We Cannot Stay Silent in the Face of Racism." A barista told me that everyone there is "a little bit queer" when I mentioned that I was writing this assignment. In that moment, this progressive refuge made me forget I was in Florida, reminding me of what a manager at Teak, a popular restaurant overlooking the pier (worth a visit for the skyline view alone), proudly mentioned during my visit: that St. Pete is "the exception to the Floridian rule."

"It's super LGBTQ-friendly, the whole region is," Covello says. "If you go to Gulfport, that's super LGBTQ, or if you go to Central Avenue from 31st down to the waterfront, you're going to find a huge community there." At the same time, Covello, who is queer and married to a woman, acknowledges that what feels friendly for her isn't necessarily true for someone else. "My life here is much easier than someone who might be trans," she adds. "I'm also white. So I don't want to minimize people that don't want to move here because they're truly afraid of living here as a transgender person. Everyone needs to do what feels safe for them from a traveler's perspective."

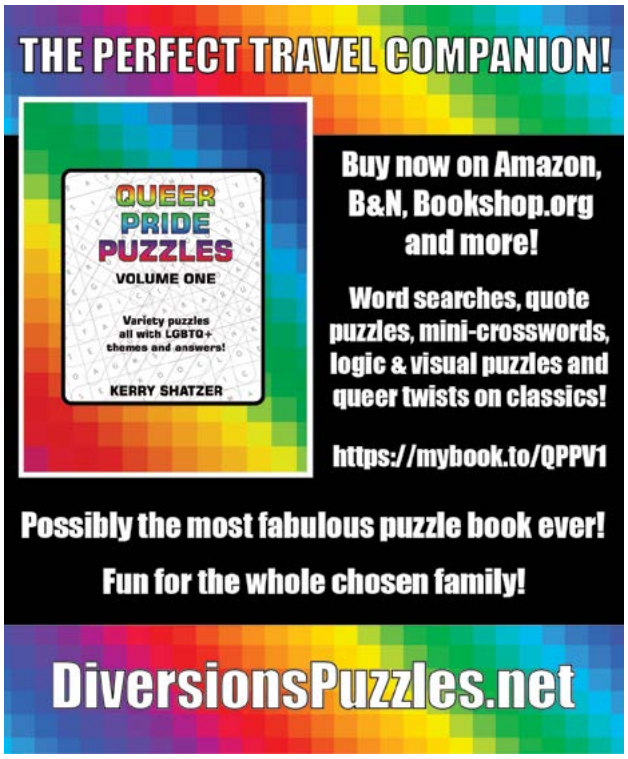
Long suggests LGBTQ+ travelers interested in going to St. Pete skip the car trip down. "Personally, I wouldn't advise somebody who's visibly queer to road trip down to Florida because you're traveling through many cities that are not as queer-friendly as St. Petersburg is," she says.

She acknowledges the "precarious" nature of traversing landscapes where your identity as a queer person hangs in delicate balance, but insists that "ultimately the truth is that we do need queer people to visit. We need queer people to move here."

Black Crow Coffee Co. in St. Pete is loud and proud about being a welcoming space for LGBTQ+ people. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

Long reveals the soul of St. Pete, which shimmers beyond its queer-friendly storefronts and the lunchmeat sometimes being flung at drag queens — it lives in the heartbeat of its people, bound together by a shared narrative: "St. Petersburg as an escape from a situation that was bad for them."

"I want St. Pete to continue being that," she adds, her words a gentle invitation to a sanctuary that refuses to dim its light.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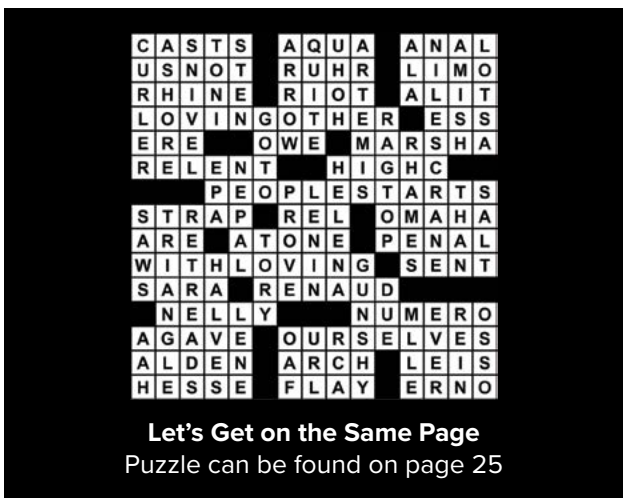

Let's Get on the Same Page
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The Movie Redefining Romance and Family with a Queer Indian Story

Roshan Sethi and Karan Soni discuss blending rom-com magic and Bollywood to create a bold, new take on queer love in 'A Nice Indian Boy'

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Karan Soni and Jonathan Groff in "A Nice Indian Boy." Photo: Levantine Films

Who couldn't use a happily ever after right now? The one in "A Nice Indian Boy" is filled with love, big dreams and even bigger emotions. If you've seen "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," it's the kind of rom-com you might recognize, but told in a refreshingly unique way.

The story begins with Naveen (Karan Soni, "Deadpool"), a socially awkward doctor, taking a slow, disheartened bite into a samosa at his sister Arundhathi's (Sunita Mani) wedding, clearly lost in his own thoughts as he wonders how his family will react to his version of the "big Indian wedding." "They obviously know I'm gay; they just haven't seen me be gay with another gay," he reflects. Soon enough, though, they will.

Naveen's "nice Indian boy," Jay (Jonathan Groff), is a photographer who, though white, has embraced his Indian culture through his adoptive parents. Their first meeting takes place at a Hindu temple, and later, Jay unexpectedly shows up at the hospital to take Naveen's new headshot. From there, their romance unfolds faster than even Naveen's mother, Megha (comedian Zarna Garg in her first acting role) thinks gay romances usually do based on what she knows of them from the films she says she's watched. Meanwhile, Naveen's father, Archit (a quietly compelling Harish Patel), is navigating his own path toward accepting his son's new relationship, though not in the way you might expect.

When "A Nice Indian Boy" premiered at SXSW in 2024, it garnered critical praise, with the film's emotional depth reflecting the personal experiences shared by Soni and his longtime romantic partner, director Roshan Sethi. Before the film's VOD release on May 6, I spoke with Soni and Sethi about "A Nice Indian Boy" being a gay film you can watch with your mom, Soni's extended sex scene with Groff that featured more "pounding," and how this is a wedding movie that has the power to reach across the aisle.

How did your shorthand with each other as romantic partners influence the film?

Roshan Sethi: We know each other so intimately that we're both very aware of what is each other's best work. I know how fun he can be and I know how well he can act, so I'm constantly pushing him to whatever that is. But my sense of what is real for Karan is so skewed because I'm so attuned to any feeling of inauthenticity in his face. I also become, when I'm directing, overly emotionally codependent. So when he was acting in some of the sadder or more frustrated scenes, I got really scared that he was mad at me, but he was acting. [Laughs.] Then, it felt horrible watching him be angry or frustrated.

Karan Soni: You are leaving your trust in the director. A lot of times, I think actors can be defensive because they just don't trust the person behind the camera. I trust Roshan. It's so easy for me to act in things that he's directing because that part of my brain shuts off.

The film pokes fun at gay film tropes before leaning into some of them. Was that intentional?

Sethi: Yeah. The whole movie is moving between two poles. One is the practical, almost cynical part of Karan, who is in a white coat in the hospital surrounded by sterile things, and more biological, logistical concerns. And then the vast, sweeping vision of Bollywood, which is, on one hand, completely ludicrous, but on the other very moving because it does feel like sometimes Bollywood is as vast and unfathomable as love itself.

One thing that's interesting about Bollywood as a genre is it's thoroughly unashamed of how over the top it is. There is no cultural respect for subtlety, which I think is good because there is none of the American reserve and restraint, none of the fear of sentimentality or emotion that sometimes makes it difficult for Americans to access their emotions in entertainment here. And growing up, especially in North America, I have such a mixed relationship with that. On one hand, I am still embarrassed and, on the other, I secretly crave it. So we're trying to make the movie move between those things.

Soni, can you talk about the emotional depth Jonathan Groff brought into the story? How did having three queer men involved impact the romance, especially with the director being your partner?

Soni: Honestly, it's so hard to make movies and, specifically, these kinds of stories are not the easiest things to make. So it took years for this movie to get made. Early on, people were like, will that be awkward? I think we both hadn't really thought about that. We were just trying to get to the start line of filming, and then when we got there, everyone in the crew was like, "So is this going to be weird?" And suddenly, I think we hadn't considered how awkward this could potentially be.

Luckily, Jonathan made us both feel so comfortable and is just the easiest person to get along with. When we were doing the sex scene, he literally just took charge of the entire thing and was like, "I know how this works. I've done it. I did 'Looking.'" He made me feel comfortable — and he made the intimacy coordinator feel more comfortable because he just has no shame. She was taking notes! I remember when she came over to meet me and Jonathan in our chairs; he really locked eyes with her. She was sharing her life secrets with him.

Sethi: I'm a very jealous person, but I never felt jealous once watching the two of them. But I think it's hard to be jealous of Jonathan — he's so harmless. It sounds like the kind of insincere thing that you say when doing press about a coworker, but it literally is the case that Jonathan is the nicest man in the world. He is just dripping with sincerity and earnestness.

I heard there was a more explicit version early on before you decided to tone it down for family audiences. What was the original direction, and how did it change?

Sethi: The original scene is actually not that much more explicit. Basically in the existing sex scene that's in the movie, you see [Jonathan's] hand going down Karan's back and then you see some heavy kissing and rolling around. What felt really romantic and sensual behind the curtain would transition to a hard cut of

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occupation and separation by promoting the image of a lone oasis of progress surrounded by violent, homophobic Arabs…"

Queer Palestinians do indeed exist, but they find no paradise in Israel. They are unable to claim refugee status in Israel if they fear persecution or mistreatment in Gaza or the West Bank. Instead, they are given temporary asylum and work permits, to facilitate them leaving for another country. There is no rainbow "escape hatch" that will let queer Palestinians flee Israeli occupation. Israeli intelligence agencies regularly blackmail queer Palestinians to work as informants. One Israeli soldier admitted that "in the training course, you actually learn and memorize different words for 'homo' in Arabic."

There is no rainbow "escape hatch" that will let queer Palestinians flee Israeli occupation.

Queer Gazans exist as well. They have shared messages on Queering the Map while under wholesale Israeli bombardment. One from the Nuseirat refugee camp read, "In solidarity with all my Palestinian brothers and sisters, you are all loved. Free Palestine." Another from Khan Younis: "Pls know despite what the media says there are gay Palestinians. We are here, we are queer. Free Palestine." To reiterate, the treatment of queer people in Gaza is in no way justification for the Israeli occupation. Israel's bombs do not discriminate regarding a person's gender identity or sexuality. The people who posted these messages are in as much danger of ending up as one of the Lancet-estimated 186,000 corpses in Gaza as any homophobic fundamentalist.

LGBTQ+ solidarity movements fighting for justice

There have been queer activists in this country who have raised their voices. ACT UP picketed Outright International for failing to advocate for queer Palestinians. Two queer Jews found themselves escorted out of the White House Pride party last year for speaking up for Palestine. Locally, members of Michigan Ceasefire Pride packed city council and county commission meetings to demand the passage of ceasefire resolutions — successfully in Ferndale; less successfully in Hazel Park and wider Oakland County. Michigan Ceasefire Pride enlisted other local organizations to speak out for Palestinian rights, including Stonewall Sports Detroit, Inclusive Justice Michigan, Grand Rapids Pride Center and Forever Pride Action of Rochester Hills.

These activists stand in a proud tradition. In the '60s and '70s, members of the Gay Liberation Front protested the war in Vietnam as out queer people. On January 23, 1991, ACT UP held its Day of Desperation action during the Gulf War. The previous night, ACT UP demonstrators interrupted Dan Rather on CBS to chant "AIDS is news; fight AIDS not Arabs." Taking over New York's Grand Central Station, protesters raised the banner "Money For AIDS, Not For War." We should revive these slogans, given the Trump administration's plans to close the Office of Infectious Diseases & HIV Policy and eliminate foreign HIV prevention programs. All this while the U.S. prepares another discounted arms sale to Israel of $8.56 billion on top of the $17.9 billion given in military aid since October 2023.

Our responsibility as American LGBTQ+ citizens

Because of the $300 billion in aid the U.S. has granted to Israel to date, every American citizen is complicit, if not responsible, for Israel's many crimes against international law. These include: the decades long settlement program, the separation wall, apartheid against Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and, most recently, what both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch conclude is a genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Queer citizens of this country have an added obligation because the war against Palestine is, in part, being fought in our names.

Of the many shocking images that have come out of the Israeli siege of Gaza, one remains stuck in my mind. It's a picture of an Israeli soldier holding up a Pride flag with "In the Name of Love" handwritten on it. Behind him are the ruins of a Gazan city, reduced to rubble by Israeli munitions.

Seeing a symbol of liberation abused to cover for war crimes and crimes against humanity is heartbreaking. To paraphrase Howard Zinn, there's no Pride flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people.

Like this soldier, queers for Palestine are also motivated by great love. Not love of apartheid and ethnic cleansing, but by love of peace and justice.

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just rough pounding. It was meant to be a joke. It was like Bollywood, but then just pounding. But it felt like it undermined their connection to make it less romantic because the whole idea is that he's not someone who thinks of his life in a Bollywood way, but the way that sex scene is shot seems so Bollywood that it seems to suggest that he's finally opening himself up to that. So to do a hard cut to rough pounding felt like it was undermining an important thing.

That was the only reason it was cut. Nobody ever asked us to cut it, and we didn't censor it for any other reason either. And it was important, obviously, to have a sex scene. There are so many explicit things in that movie that I'm still astonished they're in there, like Peter [S. Kim, as Naveen's friend Paul] talking about dick sizes and saying that big dicks are out, which is a crazy thing, obviously, to declare. And I don't know what that is rooted in. And while he's saying "we want tiny, modest dicks," his hands are so far apart as if to demonstrate what tiny and modest look like.

Soni: In those scenes, the crassness actually feels nice and funny and everything, but in the romance, it felt like you're betraying what the movie wants to be.

Sethi: At some point, we'll release that extra scene of Jonathan just pounding away. [Laughs.]

Fans will be thrilled to hear that. The last third of the film is packed with complex cultural nuances that you pull off in such a short time. What does it mean to be part of a project that tackles queer themes within Indian culture and immigrant families?

Sethi: Both of us went through some rough periods when we were coming out. It's not very easy to be gay and Indian, in general. I don't think it's easy to be gay and from a small evangelical Christian community in a small town, either. So it's not so dissimilar from the American experience outside of the big metropolitan areas. But the hardest thing for my mom when I came out was to imagine a happy life full of family. For me, it was the hardest thing. She just could not imagine anything over than solitude [for me]. And the reason she couldn't imagine it is, how could she? What is out there to lead her to believe that that is conceivable for her son? Why did her thoughts rotate around AIDS and solitude repeatedly over and over again? Because that's what she had been led to believe was the only possibility for me. So the most powerful thing to me about the movie is that if I had had access to this movie, too — the idea of this movie — it would've maybe led me to not be closeted for 20 years.

Soni: Same thing. For me, what was special about this movie is that, again, with a lot of gay movies and TV shows, I don't think I can watch any of them with my parents. "Looking," for example. And so what ends up happening is that they end up being sheltered from that. They love watching films and TV, but they don't usually see gay characters as the main characters because often in those shows, the sex scenes, or whatever it is, are too graphic for them to be invested.

What's special about this movie is it invites everyone of every generation. Watching it at festivals leading up to the release now — so many people bring their parents. It's this bonding experience. The parents don't feel vilified and they kind of weirdly feel seen. The parents in the movie are some of the best characters and have these interesting arcs and layers, and they're not just one-dimensional. I think what's so special about the movie is that it kind of brings different generations together. And that's what classic rom-coms and wedding movies have done for years, but they've just had straight people in them. So it felt very nice to have something that is quietly revolutionary, but also in a way feels old fashioned. That's been the special thing of sharing the movie with audiences.

Roshan Sethi and Karan Soni on the set of "A Nice Indian Boy." Photo: Levantine Films

I love that the parents hysterically try to understand Naveen better by watching reality shows on OUTtv. Did that come from the experience of not having anything to watch that's LGBTQ+ with your parents?

Soni: That's very much my mom. [Laughs.]

Sethi: That's his mom. And also we're big fans of OUTtv. We watched the entire season of "For the Love of DILFs" before making this movie.

Soni: To be honest, we had never heard of OUTtv before "For the Love of DILFs." And then one of our friends posted a story with a clip from that show, and we were like, "Is this the best reality show?"

Sethi: Then one of our assistant producers tracked them down. It's not a big operation. And they were like, why would you want to license this footage? They had literally never been asked to license their footage ever before. And then we were like, we're going to use it in a movie. They seemed indifferent, but we implied that the ["For the Love of DILFs"] twink is dead in the movie, and we did have to get his legal permission to claim he was dead because he's not dead. He emailed us the other day and he was like, "A bunch of my friends said that they thought I was dead." [Laughs.]

You might want to add something at the end of those credits before the film gets a wider release! Now, about Naveen's sister — her situation was eye-opening. Naveen can break the rules by being gay, but she can't when it comes to whom she marries. Can you talk about the importance of showing these family dynamics?

Sethi: The sister is actually the first character that the playwright [Madhuri Shekar] conceived of when she set out to write this story [the play was released in 2014], because she was imagining what it would be like if she married the nice Indian boy. Her parents were pressuring her to marry, and 10 years later, she was contemplating a divorce and felt trapped by their expectations. It's amazing to see the various ways in which they're all trapped, and he's trapped by certain expectations, and in some ways, they're equally profound.

Soni: The whole movie is not a coming out story, but it's what happens after all the layers of what it takes to introduce a partner to your family and how they have to acclimate at each step. One of those was for them to feel like the daughter is married off and happy, and that adds just such a layer. And then for that character, for Sunita [Mani's] character, there's just so much resentment, rightfully so, because the rules are different because she's a woman.

Were there any other motifs or small details you included that you're especially proud of?

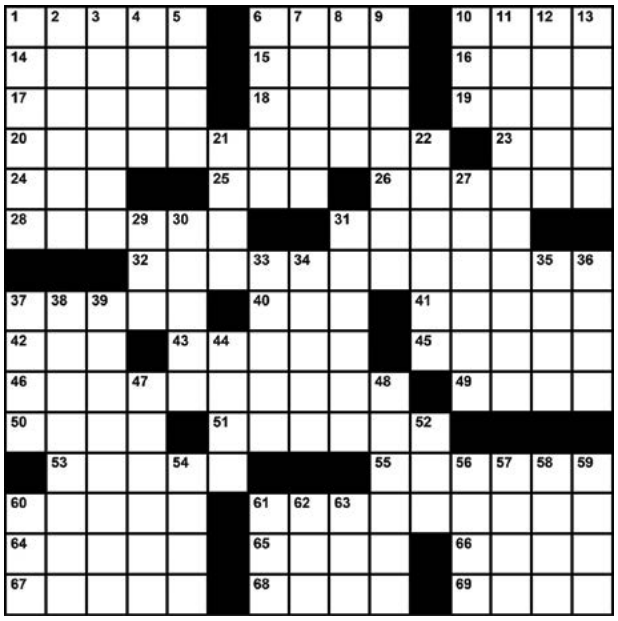
Sethi: The final scene in the movie is that they're kissing, and they're surrounded by their family in a way that is meant to visually echo those circles that came before. Because I love the idea that they are as on the nose as it is: They're kissing, and they're literally being embraced by their family around them. That is the dream. It's so aspirational, at least for me. But that feeling — that the love could not only be allowed or permitted into a family, but held up by it and supported by it — is really meaningful.

What does it mean to send this film out into the world, knowing it's so deeply tied to who you are?

Sethi: It feels so meaningful. I'm almost at a loss of words to say exactly what it feels like. Also, it has to be acknowledged that it's especially odd to be releasing this movie, which was financed during a very progressive time, in a time that is much less progressive. So, what a strange movie to be sending out into Trump's America in 2025. But I think it really is almost exactly what we need in some ways: to feel joy and acceptance and belonging and love and family is the emotion that I think our community is slowly being deprived of, especially in the next few years.

And we're in a time where we've lost empathy for each other on both sides of the political spectrum. That's obviously what leads to a never-ending fight — when you can't understand or have empathy for the other person. [This] lack of understanding and empathy for immigrants, for gay and trans people — I think movies, in a way, are the only solution to that because movies force you to acknowledge the inner life of a person that you might not know. It's such a small thing, but it's also such a powerful thing. So, by generating that in our life, the movie is very useful for people on both sides of the political spectrum.

Soni: When I started in Hollywood in 2010, there were no real roles like this for me to be in, so it's not lost on me. I feel so, so lucky to be in this — whatever part of Hollywood's history this exists in, and that we got to make it. But the other thing that I've just been feeling grateful for is I feel very frustrated and stuck with how to help and what to do. It feels overwhelming with all of the stuff that's been going around this year, but in a weird way, we made something that, if you watch, you'll feel a little bit better about the world and people. It feels really nice to be putting out something that is just turning the dial toward a more positive, inclusive world.



Let's Get on the Same Page

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25 Give a chit
26 Oldest Brady child
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◂ **Planned Parenthood**
Continued from page 7

article, BTL contributor and independent journalist Anni Arbour found that it has become commonplace for trans community members to stockpile hormones — in Michigan and beyond. When reaching out to transgender communities online to inquire about obtaining HRT through unofficial channels, Arbour encountered significant paranoia and hostility.

"While most respondents were polite, some were vicious," Arbour said. "I've been accused of being a police 'plant,' a 'snitch,' and flat-out suspected of not being trans at all. Some of the comments have been truly insulting."

Arbour's research confirmed that stockpiling of hormones "is definitely ongoing" but noted that stockpiling has been widespread since before Trump's second election. "Some trans people have been hoarding hormones for a while just in the case that they were ever banned," she noted.

Transgender community member Guinevere, who did not provide a last name, said she is worried about what she sees as "increased gatekeeping" and the paper trails that are created when accessing care that could indicate to the government that she's trans. "I'm scared to seek treatment for other mental health issues from a psychiatrist because I worry the diagnosis I know I would get would create a barrier to getting HRT," she explained.

"As far as paper trails go, Trump has indicated a desire to send citizens to El Salvador, where they are taken to a facility that I would describe as a concentration camp. With this administration's rank lawlessness, I'm worried about compromises to HIPAA privacy, especially under circumstances where they aim to remove trans people from public life in the U.S. While I don't think I'll lose access to hormones anytime soon, options will get more fragile and less safe."

Advocates frequently point to Florida as a troubling model where regulatory changes in 2023 led to the elimination of approximately 80% of transgender adult care in the state, forcing many patients to cross state lines for treatment.

Jaclyn Lahti, a local trans community member, expressed deep concern about the current climate for transgender healthcare in Michigan. "I haven't been given any guidance by healthcare providers when it comes to potential interruptions in care," Lahti said. "All of my friends have discussed plans to some degree — we're all rather worried about what might happen if the current administration gets more bold in its actions."

Lahti describes taking matters into her own hands, rationing medication to build a reserve. "I've started using my estrogen vials more times than recommended in order to save as much as I can should things get worse. I've also sped up the process of getting my orchiectomy so, worst case scenario, if my access to HRT becomes blocked I won't be hit with T. Unfortunately, insurance is set on blocking that."

She noted that stockpiling isn't the only contingency plan among her circle. "Friends are also buying HRT from abroad in bulk and stockpiling it past expiration dates to save for when the time comes. Moving to another state, or even out of the country, is on my mind and most of my close friends' minds given the state of everything."

The emotional toll is significant, Lahti added. "We're weathering the storm, but it's definitely taking a toll on all of us. In my personal opinion, it really feels like we're in Weimar, Germany and it's only a matter of time before we get targeted in even more ways reminiscent of Nazi Germany."

Lahti also expressed fears about Michigan's political future. "There's also a real fear of Michigan going red, especially with [Mike] Duggan planning to run as an independent in 2026 — it worries me that if the election is a lost cause, I'll have to move."

Note: Lahti is a member of the BTL team.

An uncertain future

The current administration's approach to reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare has Planned Parenthood preparing for further challenges.

"In the coming weeks and months, additional attacks against sexual and reproductive health care providers are expected," Thornton Greear said in the news release, citing potential restrictions on medication abortion, Medicaid coverage and further limitations on Title X funding.

Reports indicate that the Department of Health and Human Services may be preparing to release a review targeting transgender healthcare for both youth and adults. In his campaign materials, President Trump has stated his intention to investigate gender-affirming care for transgender people of any age.

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule later this year on a case challenging Tennessee's ban on gender-affirming care (U.S. v. Skrmetti). The Court's decision could have far-reaching implications for similar bans nationwide, as several states have paused their legal challenges pending this ruling.

Conservative groups have celebrated the closures. Right to Life of Michigan President Amber Roseboom called the news "good news for Michigan women" in a statement on April 11.

For Michigan's transgender community, the uncertainty adds another layer of stress to an already challenging political climate.

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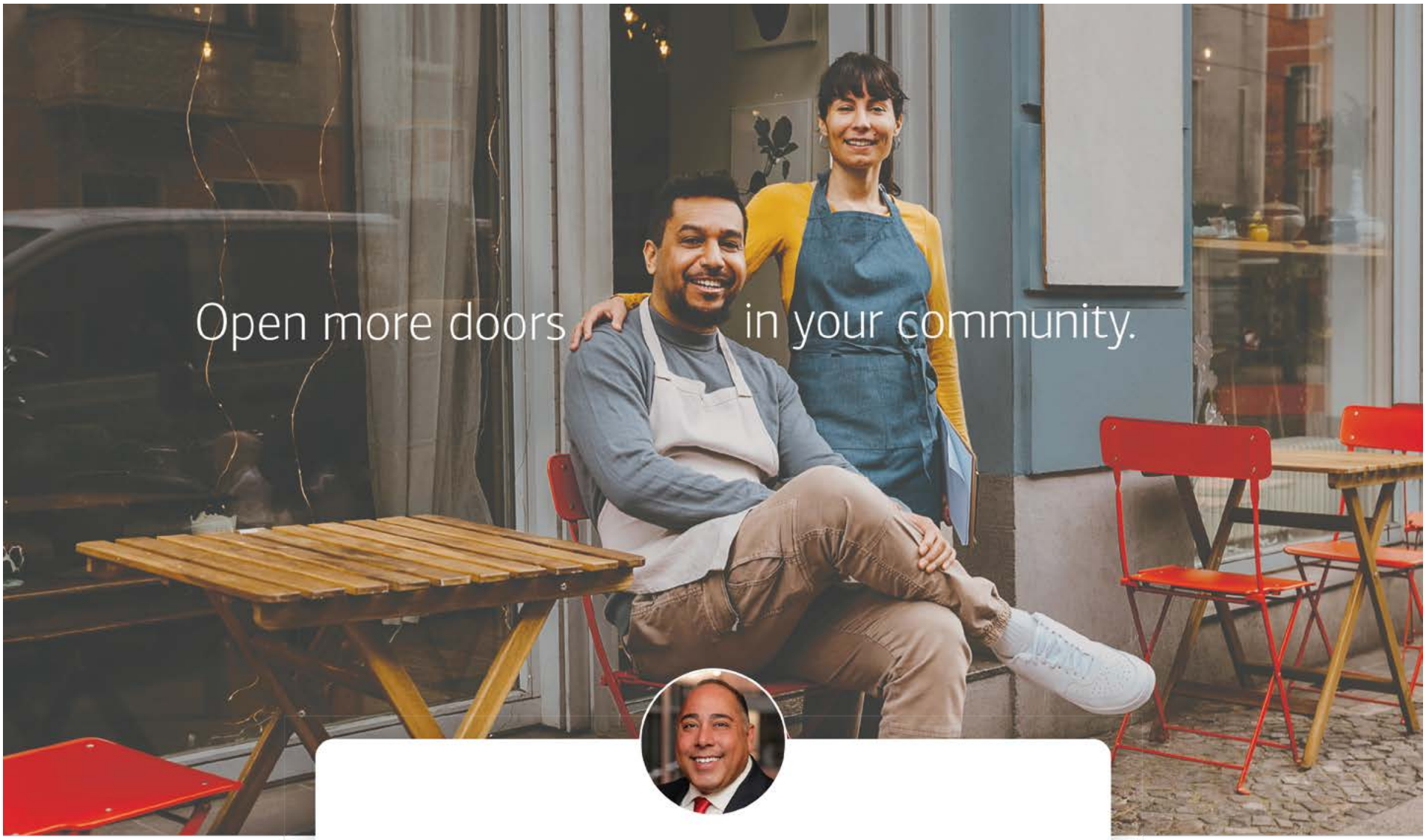
Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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